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Written Testimony before the Aging Committee

Elizabeth B. Ritter on behalf of the State Department on Aging

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Good morning Senator Flexer, Representative Serra, Senator Kelly, Representative Bolinsky and distinguished members of the Committee on Aging. My name is Betsy Ritter. I am the Acting Commissioner of the State Department on Aging. I am here today to offer testimony on SB 1005: AN ACT PROTECTING ELDERLY PERSONS FROM EXPLOITATION.

This bill, along with Raised Bill No. 896: AN ACT CONCERNING PROTECTIVE SERVICES FOR SUSPECTED ELDERLY ABUSE VICTIMS, addressed recently in the Committee on Human Services, compiles a number of issues related to the safety of older persons that the Department on Aging has begun addressing on a multidisciplinary level. As you know, the Department continues to grow and adapt to the changing needs of Connecticut's residents as we listen to concerns throughout the state. In fact, this led to the development of the Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut, the first truly public - private sector, non-political collaborative of aging, disability and elder rights advocates and agencies. Overseeing the Coalition is a Coordinating Council, referred to in this Bill, including approximately 18 members drawn from the Coalition and Co-chaired by a member of my staff and the Long-Term Care Ombudsman. The Coalition itself includes representatives from law enforcement, financial institutions, state agencies, non-profit and for-profit service providers, legal services, educational institutions, victims' services, and other groups that are addressing general elder justice and elder abuse matters along the wide spectrum of their issues. The mission of the Coalition is to develop more cohesive and collaborative initiatives to raise awareness and educate people of all ages about Elder Justice in order to prevent elder abuse as well as protect the rights and promote the independence, security, and well-being of vulnerable elders.

The Coalition already has several work groups addressing concerns included in this bill. The Financial / Bank group consisting of a Chair from Jewish Services in Fairfield, and members from the Department of Banking, Community Banking and Credit Unions, and the Departments of Social Services and Aging, has been researching best practices



throughout the country to come up with an educational program to increase awareness and reporting of abuse without increasing mandatory reporters at this time. Our Department has also been working with DSS's Protective Services for the Elderly on how to combine our mission of programming and awareness with their mission of prevention of abuse within our financial constraints and will be adding appropriate Coalition partners, including the Chief State's Attorney, who are specifically involved in prevention and prosecution of elder abuse. Consumer Fraud, Law Enforcement Education, Probate Court Concerns and Senior Safety are all workgroups in some stage of formation and operation.

I respectfully recommend utilizing the findings of these existing groups rather than duplicating their efforts in statute. Relative to defining terminology, I would also recommend that for purposes of statutory language, that the Americanized preferred term of "caregiver" from the Older Americans Act replace the older term "caretaker" which is not currently used to refer to persons.

As to other issues raised in this bill, the Department on Aging supports improvement to uniform statutes relative to Powers of Attorney, appropriate criminal sanctions when elders have been abused, and tempered actions in passing changes to the statutes before adequate study has been completed on the scope of ramifications.

Thank you for your time, and as always I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.

